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LETTER DATED 8 JANUARY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward a press release issued on 8 January 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the text of the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Press release issued at Asmara on 8 January 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea

The Ethiopian Government issues yet another threat of war

Ethiopia's Foreign Minister announced to the diplomatic community in Addis Ababa on Tuesday, 5 January 1999, that "the peace effort can be considered as good as dead".

The Foreign Minister's curious statement raises serious questions of motiv and timing, coming as it does almost three weeks after the summit of the Centra Organ was convened in Ouagadougou.

As may be recalled, the Central Organ had, among other things, taken note of the respective positions of the two parties on the proposals and requested the High-level Delegation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to remain seized with the dispute. So what has changed today? What is the rationale behind this ominous pronouncement when the High-level Delegation is in fact expected to continue its work?

We recall the threat of war made by the Foreign Minister, just on the eve of the summit of the Central Organ, asserting that "if the conflict is not resolved peacefully soon, it will not be long before the Government and leadership of Shabia (the Eritrean People's Liberation Front) are buried in the holes that they themselves have dug". So perhaps the announcement signals that the Ethiopian Government is about to unleash the war it has been preparing for the past eight months. Or perhaps not, as ultimatums and threats have long become predictable weapons in Ethiopia's diplomatic arsenal. Whatever the case only time and Ethiopia's actions during the coming days and weeks can decipher the full meaning of this oblique pronouncement.

The speech of the Foreign Minister was moreover replete with numerous fallacies, distortions and outright lies. We shall address here the most prominent ones.

1. Eritrea has certainly sought clarifications on a number of issues in the Framework Agreement. But, unless the Foreign Minister believes that this i a special prerogative reserved for Ethiopia only, this is neither abnormal nor unjustified. Indeed, his country had asked for certain clarifications during the November summit. The clarifications that Eritrea is seeking are substantiv as attested to by the High-level Delegation.

2. Eritrea did not reject the Framework Agreement. It had given its preliminary response during the November summit and its full and considered opinion on 15 December 1998, where it accepted most of the recommendations whil seeking reformulation of a few others. Ethiopia too did not accept the Framework Agreement in toto. It has accepted an amended version or its own interpretation of key clauses in the Framework Agreement.

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3. The OAU Ambassadorial Committee has not proved Eritrean aggression without a shadow of doubt, as the Foreign Minister claims unabashedly. This is an outright lie. Furthermore, Eritrea did not want to stop the Ambassadorial Committee from investigating who had been administering Badme before 12 May. Eritrea's reservations, which were duly noted by the Committee, concerned the singular focus on Badme and the incidents of 6-12 May to the exclusion of preceding incidents of Ethiopian aggression and occupation. Eritrea's communication to the Ambassadorial Committee, which was partially reproduced in the report to the Central Organ, reads:

> "It must be borne in mind that Badme is one of several Eritrean towns 'contested' by Ethiopia, although we do not as yet know the totality of Ethiopia's claims other than what can be inferred from the map of Tigray Administrative Region that carves out large swathes of Eritrean territory. For example, it would make equal sense for the Committee to collect information as to which Authority administered Adi Murug prior to July 1997. For the OAU to investigate into one without considering the other is making an unacceptable prejudgement. Moreover, administration by itself does not have any meaning if the process by which this administration was installed is illegal. What is of critical importance is where Badme, Adi Murug and other areas lie within the recognized boundary."

Eritrea's requests have been partially vindicated by the insertion in paragraph 7 of the Framework Agreement of an investigation of the incidents of July-August 1997 and 6 May 1998 in order to determine the origins of the conflict.

Ethiopia's Foreign Minister waxes eloquent on the need not to reward aggression and pleads for economic sanctions to be imposed on Eritrea. But the fact remains that it is Ethiopia which has committed repeated acts of aggression against Eritrea by, among other things, (a) forcibly occupying Eritrean territory in Bada in July 1997; (b) publishing a map that carves out large areas of Eritrean territory in October 1997; and (c) provoking the recent incidents by attacking Eritrean units on 6 May 1998 in the areas around Badme. Ethiopia has violated basic principles of international law through the illegal expulsion of (more than 47,000) Eritreans in the most inhumane manner, confiscating their property as well as detaining in special concentration camps thousands of Eritrean youth on the basis of their ethnicity. Ethiopia also refuses to renounce the use of force as a means for settling the border dispute and has consistently rejected all calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities. Eritrea welcomes the imposition of sanctions against the aggressor party, which is Ethiopia on all these counts. The purpose of the comprehensive investigations that Eritrea has called for is to corroborate this fact without any shadow of doubt. Ethiopia remains lethargic to these investigations.